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ABSTRACT

Attempts to improve urban school systems have been many and varied. Still there has been little appreciable improvement in the quality and/or results of urban education. One primary reason why the "innovations" have failed is that most of them have been introduced into an ongoing social system with little or no attempt to assess their effects on that system. Educational accountability, toward a goal of improved student learning and development, is one aspect of urban education that must be improved. Curriculum development and integration (rather than the increasing fragmentation of subject areas and cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains that we have witnessed to date) must also be pursued. Finally, staff relations and staff attitudes in regard to disadvantaged urban students must be focused upon if conditions detrimental to teaching and learning are to be improved. (Author/APM)

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Accountability, Curriculum Development, Staff Relations: The Role of the Urban School

by

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Although criticism of schools and teachers has always been a national pastime, there are disturbingly new and fundamental questions being raised. "Can reform be accomplished within the existing school structure?" asks Peter Schrag. "School systems tend to be self-serving, bureaucratic monsters," he continues. "The more the schools are used as devices of selection and exclusion, the more they will become social battlegrounds. The question is whether education in America will be regarded as a barrier or an opportunity."[1]

Among other writers who call attention to the shortcomings of the schools are Fantini and Weinstein, who assert that - "The prevailing system is not geared to the dynamic mode of the modern age, which demands lifelong adaptability to swiftly changing knowledge. Moreover, the purposes of the old education, which were shaped by a limited and virtually homogeneous clientele, have little relevance to today's diverse learning population."[2]

After a comprehensive investigation of schooling in relation to segregation, the Coleman Report revealed that the differences between segregated and non-segregated education are less dramatic than the fact that most students are in some degree shortchanged in their education.[3]

Goodlad points to the necessity for eliminating the obsolescent and embracing the innovative:

> The incidence of non-promotion, dropouts, alienation, and minimal learning in schools suggests that today's schools are obsolescent. They were designed for a different culture, a different conception of learners and learning, and a different clientele.
>
> Success in school as measured by grades appears to bear little relationship to good citizenship, good work habits, compassion, happiness or other significant human values which our civilization prizes....[4]

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Bloom reported that his investigation on individual differences in learning supported the point of view that the conventional school reduces opportunities for further learning and contributes to the alienation of youth. Bloom observed that teachers seem to expect about one-third of their students to fail or barely pass, another third to fall into an average or mediocre category, and about a third to learn adequately what is being presented. As the year goes on, these expectations become a self prophecy and are conveyed to the students through the materials and methods of instruction and through the grades and marks which they receive.

Bloom asserts that preconceived expectations such as these, prevent both teachers and students from achieving adequately, that motivation for learning is reduced, and that such expectations work against the development of the ego and self-concept of students by placing them in a humiliating position year after year in school. Not only is the damage to individuals a wasteful and destructive aspect of schools, but the cost to society of limiting opportunities for learning and increasing the problem of alienation of youth from school and society is far more than can be afforded or tolerated.[5]

The recent sharp incline of student unrest in high schools has brought uneasy thoughts to many educators. Have the schools provided such unsatisfactory experiences for some of the students that they are lashing out against the establishment in school and college? Or does the fault lie with permissive parents, an affluent society, civil rights causes, the past Vietnam war, violence on television, or access to drugs? In a systematic study of the causes of student unrest, Halleck has identified fifteen hypotheses that are widely advanced as expectations. Some are opinions, others reflect analysis of evidence. The explanations fall into three categories: problems caused by society outside the school, those caused by the school itself, and personal problems of adolescents. Each hypothesis,

however, is only a partial aspect of a highly complicated situation.[6]

All of these problems just mentioned are compounded in many ways those involved in education in an urban environment. There has been little appreciable improvement in the quality and/or the results of urban education. Achievement scores continue to lag while children and teachers flee the central city schools. School districts continue to search for "the right" program, curriculum, technological advance, or teacher in-service program, yet all involved sink deeper into the morass of frustration and despair. One primary reason why the "innovations" have failed so abysmally is that most of them have been introduced into an already on-going social system with little or no attempt to access the effects of the "innovation" on the social system. Programs were piled on top of other on-going school programs. Changes in curriculum and program were planned in central institutional frameworks within which the changes could best function. No attempt was made to build in mechanisms whereby staff had tome to plan for implementation of programs and to re-plan if problems developed. Consequently, the programs caused more havoc than they provided help. In this context, my views on accountability, curriculum development, and staff relations lend themselves not for immediate solution to all the problems, but to the crux of the situation as it now stands, and some possible suggestions for assuring public awareness.

I. The term, accountability is a relatively new term in education and has been used in many different ways. When used in connection with a school program, it essentially means that those who are given responsibility for the operation of the school (school board, administrators, teachers) should be held accountable (answerable) for the learning and development of the students. This includes accepting blame for the failure as well as credit for the successes. It may also include explaining why the failures occurred and what is being done to correct the situation. Although teachers, adminis-

trators, and school board members have always assumed responsibility for student learning, an accountability requires some sort of report to the public and possibly to some governmental agency (State Department of Education) concerning success of programs. The sudden demand for educational accountability on the part of governmental officials (national, state, and local), and by tax payer alike is commonly attributed to such factors as the following:

1. The rising cost of education and increased tax burden.
2. The public's general loss of confidence in the schools.
3. The increasing demand by the parents of disadvantaged students that greater attention be given to the achievement of their children.
4. The recognition that management techniques used in accountability programs in government and in industry were adaptable to education.

These and other factors are especially significant in an urban school system with its many complexities.

The ultimate goal of any educational accountability program is to improve learning and instruction. It is just a matter of where the emphasis is placed.

The goals and objectives are basic for any urban school accountability program. Before someone can be held responsible for student learning, a decision must be made concerning what it is that students should be expected to learn. This usually takes the form of general goals for the total school program and more specific learning objectives for each of the various areas of instruction. The latter are typically expressed in behavioral, or performance, terms to clarify the precise nature of the expected learning outcomes. An accountability program poses special problems in specifying and defining the objectives. The main purpose of any accountability program is to improve student learning and development. This is so desperately needed in our urban school environments.

II. Sputnik's orbiting of the earth in 1957 is generally credited with triggering the curriculum reform movement, although some aspect of revision began as early as 1951. Leadership in the beginning of the movement came from university professors in the academic disciplines. With financial support from the National Science Foundation, the United States Office of Education, and private foundations, other educators were drawn into the work, and from initial efforts in mathematics and science, the reform movement spread into other subject fields.

A pattern of characteristics began to emerge: (1) the emphasis was on discrete academic disciplines such as biology, chemistry, physics, economics, geography, literature, and grammar; (2) curriculum content was built around concepts, key ideas, and principles, even though in some cases these came after the selection of new content and not as prior direction to the process; (3) modes of inquiry, inductive thinking, and ways to lead the student to discover for himself were built in; and (4) a wide variety of materials was employed, such as books, films, and laboratory equipment.

Although schools were slow to adopt the new curriculum programs in the first years following Sputnik, by the end of the decade the curriculum reforms had probably reached more American schools than any of the other innovations in education. Schools throughout the country began anew to clarify and re-define their goals, to move away from such limited objectives as "covering" a body of factual information toward educating students in the modes of inquiry. Modern theories of learning were brought into educational planning. Imaginative resources were utilized. Schools and universities developed new power in team efforts. The new projects spurred efforts to devise new dimensions of pre-service and in-service education, flexible organizational arrangements, and greater access to materials and media.

Some negative side effects also developed. As the new curriculum developments came subject by subject into the schools, there was a tendency toward

fragmentation of separation of interests and little serious attention to design of the curriculum as a whole. New pressures for excellence were exerted as the early revisions were aimed at academically able students, particularly in the urban school. Curriculum change was sometimes introduced in the form of a crash program or viewed superficially as a panacea. New materials were misused in some instances because teachers lacked preparation for their new roles as stimulators of inquiry. You could imagine the problems they encountered in urban schools that had poorly trained, unexperienced, and unmotivated teachers to work with students who could care less what the curriculum was.

Curriculum is more than a collection of subjects. Schools should not settle for ready-made, shallow innovations. It is necessary to examine curriculum development in its larger context. There should be an interdisciplinary nature of several curriculum development that reflects the growing realization that the various subject fields have many elements in common.

In light of the many facets of curriculum development, as an urban university educator, my suggestions for an effective educational instructional program would include:

1. A joint enterprise of teachers, administrators, and university personnel (curriculum specialist) should specify the goals and objectives of the curricula in determining the roles and responsibilities of each group and in deciding how the instructional program is to operate.
2. A curriculum concerned with all important educational objectives: one which would include all cognitive, affective, and psychomotor outcomes of the school program.
3. A curriculum based upon objectives being stated in measurable terms. Tests and other evaluation instruments can be selected or

developed that are appropriate for the specified learning outcomes. You should select the type of evaluation instrument that measures each type of learning outcome most directly, thus a comprehensive evaluation system would be necessary. To obtain meaningful measures of students' gain of achievement, it would also be necessary to use psychometric and statistical techniques that will separate the real learning gains from the distortions produced by various contaminating factors.

4. A curriculum with a built-in mechanism for the continuous improvement of instruction and learning. There should be some type of diagnostic-feedback-correction system which would provide an adjustment for the learning failures that occur. The immediate aim would be to improve the learning of the current group of students, but the long-range goal would be the general improvement of the instructional program.
5. A curriculum that would provide freedom for teachers to experiment with new methods and materials. This requires freedom to set up experimental programs in the school and sufficient flexibility in the instructional program to permit the trying out of different classroom procedures.
6. A curriculum that evaluates possible undesirable effects from the instruction. For instance, students may achieve more arithmetic but learn to dislike school in the process; teachers may begin teaching for the test, or teachers may turn to harsh disciplines to obtain better results. All of these are signs that an instructional program is not working as intended, and thus would be considered when monitoring the effectiveness of the program.

7. A curriculum that has an adequate reporting system. This means that the results of the program would be reported to teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, students, parents, and other concerned citizens in a form that is easily understood and was most useful for decision-making. It would be essential, however, that these reports be in terms that are clear to the layman as to the professional educator. This doesn't give us a solution to all the problems in curriculum development; but at least the role of the urban school is more clearly defined as a part of the total process.

III. Staff relations in a large urban school system is not focused as much on its administrators as it is on the teachers. Of all the positions acknowledged in our big city school systems, the one position that carries the least weight in policy discussions has the lowest pay and is the most burdened with many of the problems related to urban schools is the teacher.

The types of problems which are of most concern to teachers in a big city school district were examined in a 1968 attitude study of teachers in Cincinnati Public Schools. As a part of the survey of the Cincinnati school system commissioned by Cincinnatians United for Good Schools, 130 - item questionnaires were sent to a representative 20 percent sample of the district's staff. Seventy-eight percent of the questionnaires were returned. After the 130 items were statistically classified into fifteen categories, it was found that dissatisfaction among teachers was greatest with respect to administrative practices, school-community relations, teachers' voice in the educational program, and financial incentives for teachers. These findings reflect the special severity of the difficulties encountered by teachers working in large, centralized school districts with heavy concentrations of economically disadvantaged students. For example, only 14 percent of the

teachers felt that administrators were attentive to suggestions from staff, only 9 percent were more satisfied than dissatisfied with relations between teachers and the school board; 66 percent were dissatisfied with the educational orientation of the communities in which they taught, 79 percent felt that teachers had too small a role in selecting textbooks, and 91 percent felt that outstanding performance was inadequately rewarded financially.[7] I doubt if these percentages would change very much even today.

Most observers agree a substantial porportion of inner-city teachers either possess or develop somewhat negative expectations concerning the likelihood that a group of disadvantaged students generally will achieve as well on the average, as a group of economically privileged students. Most observers also agree that negative expectations on the part of teachers play a part in dampening the performance of many disadvantaged students by causing them to become anxious about their performance and reducing their motivation to learn.

Starting with this fairly obvious observation, a number of educators justifiably unhappy with the situation in inner-city schools, have asserted that negative or low teacher expectations are almost the sole root cause of low achievement among disadvantaged students. If only teachers would expect as much from students in the inner-city school as from students elsewhere, appropriate learning methods and materials in the classroom would be enough to overcome the performance deficit typically found in these schools.

Because the influence of external conditions and decisions is most obvious in big city classrooms, acceptance of new roles for the teacher has tended to come first and most rapidly in the big cities. For a while, urban teachers tended to react with frustration to changes and problems in their schools. Many complained about how difficult it was to educate children

growing up in the inner city, and about overcentralization in the urban school district. Eventually, however, many teachers began to understand that if they were professionally responsible for helping students learn, perhaps they had an obligation to work more closely with parents, to insist on change and improvement in curriculum and instruction, to work toward better structural arrangements for decision-making in their school or school district, and otherwise help change conditions detrimental to teaching and learning.

Not all teachers are ready to admit or act on the conclusion that education cannot be unconcerned with social conditions that directly affect their professional effectiveness, but such awareness seems to be growing fairly rapidly. A willingness to take a decisive position on controversial social issues affecting the schools is not confined to teachers in the largest cities. As suburban schools evolve further, suburban teachers may become as vigorous a force for educational and social change as many of their big city counterparts have become.

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